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ABSTRACT

An action research project described a program for teaching students beginning reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers. The targeted population consisted of first grade elementary students in a growing middle class community located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. The problems of beginning readers not using strategies to help them become independent readers was documented with test scores, student surveys, student writing samples, teacher observations, and pre and post inventory tests. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students who do not coordinate multiple strategies to improve their understanding and memory of text do not become strong readers. Also, a child's ability to profit from opportunities to learn to read and spell is based on a foundation of language skills built during preschool years. During the past decade, systematic and explicit instruction designed to help students acquire this foundation has not been commonplace. Further data reveals that although the term "phonemic awareness" is a rather new one to reading educators, teachers who work with primary grade children have seen children with difficulties in this area for a long time. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others resulted in the development of a series of measurements to identify students who do not use beginning reading strategies. Some of the strategies include: knowledge of letters and their sounds, concepts of print, and phonemic awareness. Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of beginning reading strategies which helped them become independent readers. (Contains 18 references.) (RS)

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IMPROVING BEGINNING FIRST GRADERS' READING STRATEGIES

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the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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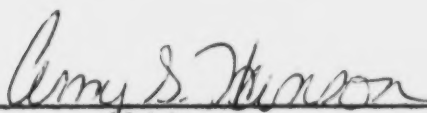
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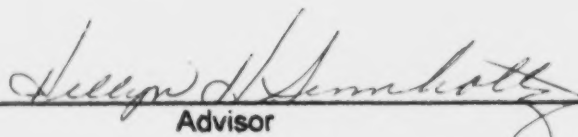
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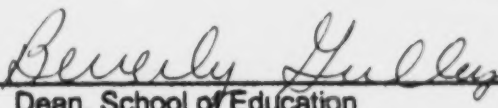
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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for teaching students beginning reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers. The targeted population consists of first grade elementary students in a growing middle class community located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. The problem of beginning readers not using strategies to help them become independent readers was documented with test scores, student surveys, student writing samples, teacher observations, and pre and post inventory tests.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students who do not coordinate multiple strategies to improve their understanding and memory of text do not become strong readers. Also, a child's ability to profit from opportunities to learn to read and spell is based on a foundation of language skills built during preschool years. During the past decade, systematic and explicit instruction designed to help students acquire this foundation has not been commonplace. Further data reveals that although the term "phonemic awareness" is a rather new one to reading educators, teachers who work with primary grade children have seen children with difficulties in this area for a long time.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others resulted in the development of a series of measurements to identify students who do not use beginning reading strategies. Some of the strategies include: knowledge of letters and their sounds, concepts of print, and phonemic awareness. These skills are necessary for success in early reading and writing.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of beginning reading strategies which helped them become independent readers.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted first grade class do not use beginning reading strategies that will help them become independent readers. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes the following tests: letter identification, sight word vocabulary identification, a developmental spelling inventory, and a student writing sample.

Immediate Problem Context

According to the 1996 School Report Card, the elementary school setting for this first grade class has a population of 583 students. The targeted school fosters safety and the proper atmosphere for the pursuit of learning by having high expectations and by promoting respect and a sense of caring for others. It offers special programs to adapt the academic program to meet the needs of specific groups of students. It has 11 special teachers who teach students with special needs: one gifted resource teacher, one speech clinician, one diagnostician, one psychologist, and two reading resource teachers, one is a full-time teacher and the other is a part-time teacher. There are also two physical education teachers, an art teacher, and a music teacher to provide a balanced curriculum for all students. There are 25 elementary education teachers to teach the school's

kindergarten through fifth grade student population, and the average class size is 25 students. Less than 1% of the total student population is from a minority background and there are no students reported from low-income families. The school has a 96.2% attendance record with no chronic truants. The school has been awarded a Blue Ribbon for Excellence in Education by the U.S. Department of Education because of its success in meeting high academic standards and creating quality educational opportunities for its students.

The school population exceeds the recommended enrollment of 450 students for the size of the facility which was designed in 1967. It is a circular building with the media center in the middle of the school on the main level. The classrooms surround it in order to accommodate the student's research projects and computer needs. There is one art room on the third level of the building and a music room and a gymnasium on the lower level of the building. The gymnasium is used for physical education, general assemblies, plays, cultural arts programs, and as a cafeteria. The special needs teachers' rooms are either small rooms or partitioned off areas located in different places throughout the building. The nurse's office is located on the main level by the principal's office and is a small room with a bathroom. A school improvement referendum was passed on April 1, 1997 which will provide funds to upgrade the size of the facility in order to accommodate the increasing student enrollment.

The Surrounding Community

The school is part of a community school district in the northwest suburbs of a large metropolitan area in a midwestern state. This school district has been awarded three Blue Ribbons for Excellence in Education by the U.S. Department of Education. The district serves a 72-square mile area covering this suburb and all or part of nine neighboring suburbs. More than 6,800 students are enrolled at its eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and high school. The per pupil expenditure is estimated at \$7,607.

Thirty percent of the teachers making up the faculty in this district have bachelor degrees and 70% have master degrees and above. The average teaching experience is 15 years and the pupil/teacher ratio is 18.2:1 at the elementary level.

After two consecutive attempts at passing a school improvement referendum in this predominately white collar upper middle-class community where the per capita income ranges from \$30,000 to \$60,000 and the median price of a single-family home is \$218,100 (1990 census), it was passed on April 1, 1997. This referendum will enable the school district to build two new elementary schools and an addition to the new middle school. This will accommodate the projected increase in student enrollment.

The district is guided by its Strategic Plan which was developed through the cooperation of faculty, students, parents, and community leaders. Improvement plans at the elementary school include: increased use of technology to enhance the K-5 curriculum; emphasis on relationships among subjects; continued use of performance assessments to evaluate student progress;

collaborative efforts to infuse higher order thinking skills and problem solving as a critical part of teaching and learning; increased parental involvement in school; promotion of global perspectives; and improved communications between school and home.

National Context of the Problem

In a recent article Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O'Hara, and Donnelly (1997) describe beginning first grade readers as follows:

Many first graders appear to make discoveries about words and learn to read without explicit instruction. Being read to, reading and rereading favorite books, inventing spellings, and composing text seems sufficient to get them on the road to becoming readers. However, other equally bright first graders, with similar backgrounds, experience this same rich literacy environment but do not learn to read. They are students who have devised strategies for learning words that are not very reliable or efficient. (p. 312)

The teacher aims to produce in the student a set of behaviors which will ensure a self-improving system. With a self-improving set of behaviors, the more the reader reads, the better he gets, and the more unnecessary a teacher becomes (Clay, 1990).

The problem of teaching first graders to use reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers has generated concerns throughout the United States. In his article about preventing reading failure, which indicates a growing national concern that students are not becoming readers, Pikulski (1994) focuses on five first grade intervention programs in the United States for students most at risk for reading failure.

One program, in the Winston-Salem, North Carolina area, for schools with a high percentage of at risk students is the Winston-Salem Project. Another program of this type is Success For All in the Baltimore and Philadelphia areas. For schools with small at risk groups, there's the Early Intervention in Reading Project in the Minnesota area and the Boulder Project in Boulder, Colorado. Throughout the United States, there's the Reading Recovery Program which is a one-to-one tutoring program for students at risk.

According to Clay (1991), the founder of the Reading Recovery Program, the reading process involves the following:

Reading, like thinking, is very complex. When you think, all you have to do is produce the responses from within you. When you read you have to produce responses which interpret what the author wrote: you have to try to match your thinking to his. When you think you do not think in single words but rather you find sequences of words which express sequences of ideas. Similarly reading involves sequence of ideas.

Most people are familiar with the old game 'Twenty Questions' or 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral.' Reading is very much like that. The smartest readers ask of themselves the most effective questions for reducing the uncertainty; the poor readers ask trivial questions and waste their opportunities to reduce uncertainty. They do not search for information in effective ways, and they have not learned the complex relationships between items of information and strategic activity. (p. 320)

Students' progress in reading seems to be closely related to reading strategy acquisition (Dunkeld & Dunbar, 1983). The use of Clay's (1990) diagnostic survey in the classroom yields an extensive array of data. "It shows in detail what knowledge, concepts, and strategies students possess and are using in a number of categories of reading and writing behavior" (Dunkeld & Dunbar, 1983, p. 42). Students making good progress have acquired and are using a number of strategies (Dunkeld & Dunbar, 1983). The survey helps with the early detection of students with reading difficulties (Clay, 1993). This diagnostic information from the whole class influences and causes some modification of instruction to meet the needs of the whole class or selected individuals (Dunkeld & Dunbar, 1983). Clay (1990), Dunkeld and Dunbar (1983) agree that it's important for first grade students to learn to use effective reading strategies that will help them become independent readers.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Evidence of the problem is documented by a series of informal (not standardized) measures of early literacy development. These measures provide information about the skills and strategies students are using to learn to read and write. The measures selected also provide the teacher with common targets for attainment by the end of first grade.

The district policy for first grade literacy assessment is for each first grade teacher to assess all students in his/her classroom according to the district first grade literacy measurements. The five lowest performing students in each first grade class are then retested by the school's reading resource teachers using the same district first grade measurements to verify results. The assessment results are used to rank these students' performances from the lowest to the highest and to choose the lowest performing students in first grade for reading resource service. The ranking of the first grade students is based solely on the targeted school's first grade population in accordance with the district's first grade literacy assessments. The reading resource teachers then make recommendations for additional support in literacy development for these low functioning students.

These initial informal assessments include an upper-case and lower-case letter identification, a sight word vocabulary identification, a developmental spelling inventory, and a student writing sample. Some of these measures are used initially to inform instruction. Others are used periodically to continue to inform instruction and to document student progress over time. The results of these measures will be shown and discussed in this chapter and subsequent chapters.

To identify and document the students use of beginning reading strategies, the researcher gathered evidence by assessing all students of the targeted first grade class using the following district literacy assessments: (a) letter identification, (b) sight word vocabulary, (c) developmental spelling inventory, and (d) writing samples.

Letter Identification

Twenty targeted first grade students were tested on the 26 lower-case letters and the 26 upper-case letters of the alphabet plus two commonly used fonts for the lowercase letters a and g. The researcher recorded correct letter name responses only.

Seventy-five percent of the students identified 54 letters with little or no difficulty. The letter identification scores for the lowest scoring students were not extremely low, but they were the five lowest scores of the targeted first grade class of 20 students. One of the lowest scores of the lowest scoring students was 49 letters out of 54 letters and the other four lowest scoring students' scores were 50 letters of 54 letters. Similar results were obtained in the sight word identification test.

Sight Word Identification

Over the years researchers have carefully tabulated the highest-utility words. The sight word identification assessment consists of 100 high-frequency first grade level sight words. The list of words was compiled initially from the American Heritage Word Frequency Study. According to Sitton (1992), these words were cross-checked with other respected studies.

Seventy-five percent of the students identified ten or more of the 100 sight words. Two students scored zero on sight word identification. One low scoring student scored a three and two low scoring students scored a five on sight word identification.

There is a significant difference between the two main groups of students as shown by their developmental levels indicated on the developmental spelling inventories.

Developmental Spelling Inventory

The developmental spelling inventory is not intended to be scored, but is to be used as an observational tool by the researcher for assessing growth and development in areas of hearing/writing sounds in words as well as visual information about printed text.

There are five developmental levels of spelling with the following features:

1. Precommunicative. Precommunicative spelling is the "babbling" stage of spelling. Children use letters for writing words but the letters are strung together randomly. The letters in precommunicative spelling do not correspond to sounds.

2. Semiphonetic. Semiphonetic spellers know that letters represent sounds. Spellings are often abbreviated representing

initial and/or final sounds.

3. Phonetic. Phonetic spellers spell words like they sound. The speller perceives and represents all of the phonemes in a word, though spellings may be unconventional.

4. Transitional. Transitional spellers think about how words appear visually; a visual memory of spelling patterns is apparent. Spellings exhibit conventions of English orthography like vowels in every syllable and vowel digraph patterns, correctly spelled inflectional endings, and frequent English letter sequences.

5. Correct. Correct spellers develop over years of word study and writing. Correct spelling can be categorized by instruction levels; for example, correct spelling of a body of words that can be correctly spelled by the average fourth grader, would be fourth-grade level correct.

Seventy-five percent of the students scored at the phonetic level or above the phonetic level. The five lowest scoring students of the targeted first grade class scored below the phonetic stage. Three students scored at the precommunicative stage of development and two students scored between the precommunicative and the semiphonic stages of development.

The students' writing samples also showed significant differences between the lower scoring students and the rest of the students in the targeted classroom.

Writing Sample

First grade teachers use writing samples to gather information about each student's writing development. This information helps to guide teacher instruction, shows progress, and facilitates communication about literacy growth. Collecting

and analyzing student writing is a necessary component of an effective literacy program.

The district refers to the examples of writing development adapted from Clay's (1993) early literacy assessment. The examples indicate six stages of writing:

1. Scribbling. Draws "squiggles" and other shapes to represent letters. Writes letter-like forms.
2. Drawing/Picture Writing. Uses pictures to represent words of letters.
3. Random Letters. Uses some letters, but there is no relationship between letters chosen and the sounds in the words that are written. Forms some letters correctly. Writes strings of letters, "squiggles," and other shapes to represent sequential thoughts.
4. Early Invented Spelling. Uses some letters to represent sounds in words. Forms some letters correctly. May use rebus writing (with pictures and letters).
5. Transitional Spelling. Writes some readable words. Features of conventional spelling begin to appear. May use some sentences. Forms most letters correctly.
6. Conventional Spelling. Writes readable words and sentences. Uses conventional spelling. Forms most letters correctly. Sentences may or may not use punctuation.

In the writing sample, seventy-five percent of the students were at the Early Invented Spelling, the Transitional Spelling, or the Conventional Spelling stage. One of the low scoring students wrote random letters and then erased them. This student decided to draw a picture instead of writing. Two other low scoring

students wrote two letters next to each other with each letter representing two different words. The beginning letters were correct for the two words that the students wanted to write but there was no knowledge of spaces between words. This writing was followed by an insistence that the teacher help with the spelling of their last word and then no further attempt at writing was made by the students. The fourth low scoring student also wrote two beginning letter sounds that correctly represented the beginning of the two separate words with spaces between each letter, and then followed these letters with three random letters that had no letter/sound association. The last student wrote two correct letters using early invented spelling and then wrote two clusters of letters attempting to write words randomly with no letter/sound association.

Conclusion

The letter identification, the sight word vocabulary test, the developmental spelling inventory, and the writing sample for the targeted first grade students are informal measures of early literacy development. These measures provide valuable information about the skills and strategies that the students are using. The results of these measures indicate that the five lowest scoring students are not using beginning strategies that will help them become independent readers. Even though the five lowest scoring students could identify most of the letters of the alphabet, they knew few if any of the high-frequency sight words. Also, their ability to identify most of the letters of the alphabet did not help them with letter/sound relationships as indicated by their performance on the developmental spelling inventory. They did not

know that the letters of the alphabet represented certain sounds and that letters are combined to make words. This lack of knowledge was also indicated by their writing samples. Their attempts at writing showed little or no awareness that words are spelled like they sound.

Two of the five lowest scoring students from the targeted first grade class were recommended for immediate additional support in literacy development. These students will get reading support services for 30 minutes a day Monday through Friday. The other three of the low scoring students' names were put on a waiting list for retesting and possible reconsideration at a later date when a time slot is available for reading support services. The goal of the reading resource teacher is to help the students attain reading skills and strategies that will help them become independent readers and to move them from the lowest ranking students in the targeted first grade class to the average or middle position in the class ranking.

Educators have stated different probable causes for students not having beginning reading strategies that will help them become independent readers.

Probable Causes

Literature suggests several underlying causes for the existence of the problem. One cause that prevents children from becoming independent readers is that the low progress reader or reader at risk tends to operate on a narrow range of strategies (Clay, 1993). Other causes are that the reader may not have a clear understanding of the concepts of print (Clay, 1993), or may lack phonemic awareness.

Clay (1993) elaborates on how the low progress reader operates on a narrow range of strategies.

Strategies

According to Clay (1993) when the low progress reader or reader at risk operates on a narrow range of strategies:

He may rely on what he can invent from his memory for the language of the text but pay no attention at all to visual details. He may disregard obvious discrepancies between his response and the words on the page. He may be looking so hard for words he knows and guessing words from first letters that he forgets what the message is about. Unbalanced ways of operating on print can become habituated when they are practiced day after day. They become very resistant to change. This can begin to happen in the first year of formal instruction. (p. 9)

Clay (1991) further states that in learning to read, a child must develop a clear understanding of the basic concepts of print.

Concepts of Print

The basic concepts of print that Clay (1991) is referring to are:

- (a) basic concepts such as a letter, word, sound, drawing, writing, and reading; (b) hierarchical concepts such as collections of letters which make up words, and collections of words which make up sentences; and (c) terms for position like first and last, beginning or start and end, and next, when they apply within the directional constraints of the printer's code. (p. 141)

Therefore, students who do not develop a clear understanding of (a), (b), and (c) have difficulty learning to read. Clay (1991) also says that:

The young child does not have a concept of the spoken word that matches his teacher's concept. Up to the age of eight years children confuse isolated sounds and syllables with words. Reid (1966) and Clay (1967) found children had limited understanding of a word or a letter and of the purposes of reading. (p. 135)

Newman and Church (1990) support Clay's findings by stating that:

No one can read without taking into account the graphophonemic cues of written language. As readers all of us use information about the way words are written to help us make sense of what we're reading. But these cues aren't the only clues readers use. We use a variety of other language cues: cues about meaning (semantic cues) and cues about the structure of a particular text passage (syntactic cues). We use pictorial cues when they're available, we bring our general knowledge about the subject into play, and we bring all our previous experience with reading and writing to bear when we read. (p. 20)

Gaskins et al. (1997) found that a child's ability to profit from opportunities to learn to read and spell is based on a foundation of language skills built during the preschool years and that during the past decade, systematic and explicit instruction

designed to help students acquire this foundation has not been commonplace. They found that children who enter first grade with a strong foundation are aware that the white spaces between groups of letters signal where words begin and end. They can segment words into individual sounds as they attempt to write them, for example, breaking dad into three sounds, /d/ /a/ /d/. They can match sounds with letters, and they can rhyme simple words such as not-pot, will-pill, and can-man. But what about the children who lack this foundation? Gaskins et al. (1997) state that these are the students who are at risk for reading failure in first grade.

The beginning readers who do not use reading strategies that will help them become independent readers at the targeted school are operating on a narrow range of strategies. The Developmental Spelling Inventory and the writing sample for these students indicate that they have little or no awareness that words are spelled as they sound. These assessments also indicate that they do not have a clear understanding of basic concepts of print such as letter, word, sound, drawing, writing, and reading or hierarchical concepts such as collections of letters which make up words, and collections of words which make up sentences. Another researcher (Stahl, 1997) suggests that "phonemic awareness" is an area of difficulty for beginning readers.

Phonemic Awareness

In Stahl's (1997) article, he clearly states that phonemic awareness is considered an important prerequisite for learning phonics, and for learning to read. In fact, Stanovich (as cited by Stahl, 1997) said that the research on phonemic awareness is

the most important contribution to our knowledge about reading in the past 20 years. According to Stahl (1997), children who lack phonemic awareness have been in our classes a long time, and educators have called this inability other things:

But phonemic awareness is not "auditory discrimination," nor is it "hearing" the sounds in words. Children can "hear" all the sounds in a word if they are able to repeat that word. In contrast, phonemic awareness (or phonological awareness) is the ability to think about those sounds; it refers to the conscious awareness that spoken words consist of sounds. Phonemic awareness is also not the same thing as "phonics." Phonemic awareness refers to sounds in spoken words; in contrast, phonics refers to the relationships between letters and sounds in written words. However, phonemic awareness is considered an important prerequisite for learning phonics, and for learning to read. The ability to think consciously about the sounds in spoken words is important, and probably necessary, for children to acquire more than rudimentary reading skills. (p. 58)

Consistent with Stahl's beliefs, The Council for Exceptional Children (1995) has noted that a culmination of recent research shows that phonological awareness of language is crucial to reading success. In conclusion, while it is known that children develop early reading and writing skills at their own rates and in their own ways, research shows that there are developmental aspects of learning to read and write and that an acquisition of certain skills and strategies is necessary for success in reading

and writing especially for beginning readers who do not use reading strategies that will help them become independent readers.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The literature search for solution strategies that will help beginning readers become independent readers begins with Clay (1993a) who believes that reading is a complex process and that all readers, from five-year-old beginners on their first books to the effective adult reader need to use:

(a) their knowledge of how the world works; (b) the possible meanings of the text; (c) the sentence structure; (d) the importance of order of ideas, or words, or of letters; (e) the size of words or letters; (f) special features of sound, shape, and layout; and (g) special knowledge from past literary experiences before they resort to left to right sounding out chunks or letter clusters or, in the last resort, single letters. (p. 9)

Independent readers read for meaning. If what they've read doesn't make sense or sound or look right, they search for links between items of print that will help them relate what they know to what they don't know about print, and they'll problem solve in their heads to self-correct. Instruction begins with helping the low progress reader construct meaning.

Constructing Meaning

Clay (1993a) clearly states that the high progress reader operates on print in an integrated way in search of meaning. McTague (1997), who agrees with Clay, uses Reading Recovery strategies as a guide to help classroom teachers teach beginning readers to read. These strategies teach children how to think or problem solve "in their heads" when they encounter unknown words in reading and writing. "As they read, children actively search for links between items and relate new discoveries to things that they know (Clay, 1993b). This linking process orders the complexity of print and therefore simplifies it" (McTague, 1997, p. 43).

As the children read, classroom teachers can ask specific questions that prompt them to think and to solve the problems of recognizing unknown words. Some of these questions are "Does it make sense?" "Does it sound right?" "Does it look right?" These prompts enable the child to think about the meaning, visual, and structural aspects of the story (McTague, 1997).

Clay (1993a) says that slow-progress children also need many more opportunities for independent reading than they usually get. Stanovich, Allington, and Berliner concur with Clay (as cited by McTague, 1997) that good readers get better because they read more.

Although reading easy books independently is essential to success, McTague (1997) suggests that children also need to experience instruction at a level that presents new challenges so that they can use the "in the head" strategies. According to McTague (1997), classroom teachers can use book introductions in

the same way that Reading Recovery teachers do:

A reading recovery teacher tells the child a short general sentence about the book, points out certain language phrases that might present trouble, and explains unusual or unfamiliar vocabulary. The teacher then flips through the book, perhaps asking very open-ended questions about the story, so that the child is thinking about the plot and starting to engage in the constructing of the meaning.

The teacher might point out a critical or important picture, but should not do a "picture walk" or talk about all of the pictures. Talking about all of the pictures leaves the child with the idea that the pictures carry the message. Too much discourse about the pictures in the story can disengage the child from the reading activity. (p. 45)

After helping the low progress reader construct meaning, McTague (1997) also suggests that the teacher focus on graphophonic (visual) cues.

Visual Discrimination

The teacher might next have the child locate a couple of known words as well as one or two unknown words that are new and will be needed to read the story. For example, if a child has not encountered a story with dialogue before, then locating the word "said" would be helpful. To locate an unknown word the teacher might say what would you expect to "see" or "hear" at the beginning of the word. This type of activity enables the child(ren) being taught to use some of

the visual aspects of the book while reading. In the words "Wishy Washy," for example, the child would respond with the /w/ sound. (McTague, 1997, p. 45)

To be effective in teaching graphophonics, Clay (1993a) suggests that the teacher uses the reading/writing connection to reinforce letter/sound associations.

Reading/Writing Connection

Clay (1993a) finds that children who are not succeeding in reading are not successful in writing. If the teacher combines reading and writing instruction it enables the child to link the two literacy processes, encouraging reciprocal gains between them.

"Learning to write supports learning to read" (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 46). Writing is an integral part of gaining control over written language. Through the writing process children are involved in putting together letters and words which make up sentences. The left to right conventions are also being reinforced while the children are practicing handwriting to help them become familiar with the forms of letters (Ministry of Education, 1994).

Another important insight that McTague (1997) has gained from her Reading Recovery training is the value of observing children's reading behaviors. She asks questions like: "Why did the children respond in that way?" "Why did the children write that?" "Why did the children make this reading error?" These recorded observations enable her to reflect about the children and adjust her teaching strategies according to the strengths the children are exhibiting. Some children are not ready to write because they

lack phonological awareness. This skill must be taught before they begin reading.

Phonological Awareness

In addition to what Clay (1993a) and McTague (1997) agree is good practice for teaching beginning readers reading strategies to help them become independent readers, The Council for Exceptional Children (1995), supports researchers who believe that phonological awareness, combined with specific phonics instruction and whole language techniques, gives children the skills to decode words rapidly and accurately, which is essential for reading comprehension.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (1995) indicates that a culmination of recent research shows that phonological awareness of language is crucial to reading success.

"Phonological awareness requires the brain to divide a single pulse of sound into its constituent units. Students who lack phonological awareness do not have a system that understands that "cat" has three separate sound" (CEC, 1995, p. 8). Accordingly, CEC (1995) supports this research and the researchers who recommend that students who experience reading problems should receive specific instruction in phonological awareness which include the following exercises:

1. Expose children to nursery rhymes to highlight how sounds are stripped from words and replaced with other sounds to make new words.
2. Teach phoneme segmentation: What sounds do you hear in the word hot?
3. Play oddity games: Which last sound is different in doll,

hop, and top? Which middle sound is different in pin,
gun, bun?

4. Play sound to word matching: Is there a /k/ in bike?
5. Work on sound isolation: What is the first sound in rose?
6. Teach blending skills: What word do the sounds /m/ /a/ /t/ make?
7. Teach children to tap out the number of syllables in a word such as backyard or the number of sounds in single syllable words such as mat, pin, big, etc.
8. Play syllable/phoneme deletion games: Say backyard. Now say backyard without the back. Say cat. Now say cat without the /t/ sound.
9. Use chips or markers to represent syllables or sounds in words. (p. 9)

In addition to phonological awareness, CEC (1995) supports the researchers who have identified eight additional skills that a student needs to read successfully. These skills are:

1. Learning print awareness—Recognizing and naming letters, letter sounds, and the alphabet. This skill also involves helping children become aware of the many ways print is used in their environment (signs, books, advertisements in stores).
2. Writing letters to recognize shapes.
3. Learning letter sounds.
4. Associating alphabetic symbols with words—Progress from learning individual letter sounds to blending letter sounds together to form words.
5. Developing decoding and word recognition skills (sounding

out words)—Give students a comprehensive system of decoding techniques, including instruction in word families, decoding strategies, and practice writing letter/sound correspondence.

6. Identifying words in print accurately and easily—Provide opportunities to apply letter/sound correspondences in words that occur in text. Text should include only words that do not violate the pattern learned.
7. Knowing spelling patterns—Reinforce letter patterns by spelling simple words.
8. Comprehending language—Create opportunities to discuss the main parts of stories, relate information presented in books to other events, and ask questions about what events in the story mean. (CEC, 1995, p. 9)

Stahl (1997) also emphasizes that phonemic awareness is necessary for children to learn to read words. His research highlights the importance of both assessing children's phonemic awareness and providing phonemic awareness training as part of a kindergarten and first grade program. To examine a child's phonemic awareness Stahl (1997) suggests the following tasks:

1. Rhyming. Here we ask a child to orally give us, for example, a word that rhymes with "play."
2. Word-to-Word or Sound-to-Word Matching Tasks. These involve judging whether the sounds in words are the same or different. For example, we might ask a child whether a series of words begins with the same sound.
3. Full Segmentation. In this task, the child articulates, separately, each sound segment in a spoken word.

4. Partial Segmentation. In this task, the child is asked to segment one sound in a word separately from the other sounds. For example, the child might separate the beginning sound from the rest of the word.
5. Blending. This is the "flip side" of segmentation. In this task, children put together words from their isolated sounds.
6. Deletion and Manipulation. In deletion tasks a child is told to mentally remove a portion of a word to make another word. (p. 59)

When teaching children to be aware of sounds in spoken words Stahl (1997) stresses:

(a) to begin with a small set of sounds, possibly teaching them one at a time; (b) research has shown that using the alphabet during instruction not only makes it easier to learn phonemic awareness, but also leads to stronger effects on reading; and (c) begin by using illustrative words that begin with continuant consonant sounds (/m/, /s/, /n/, /f/, /z/, /v/, and other consonants in which sounds can be continued) and vowels because these can be sounded by themselves. (p. 60)

In a review of the research on phonemic awareness Yopp (1995) also states that there is substantial evidence that phonemic awareness is strongly related to success in reading and spelling acquisition. Some educators confuse phonemic awareness with phonics.

Phonics

"Phonemic awareness is not phonics. Phonemic awareness is awareness of sounds in spoken words; phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds in written words" (Stahl, 1992, p. 621). Stahl (1992) purports that phonics instruction can and should be built into all beginning reading programs. "Phonics instruction should be integrated and relevant to the reading and writing of actual texts, based on and building upon children's experiences with texts" (Stahl, 1992, p. 620). Exemplary phonics instruction:

(a) builds on a child's rich concepts about how print functions; (b) builds on a foundation of phonemic awareness; (c) is clear and direct; (d) is integrated into a total reading program; (e) focuses on reading words, not learning rules; (f) may include onsets and rimes; (g) may include invented spelling practice; (h) develops independent word recognition strategies, focusing attention on the internal structure of words; and (i) develops automatic word recognition skills so that students can devote their attention to comprehension, not words. (Stahl, 1992, p. 620)

Teaching phonics is not sufficient in itself. An effective reading program for low progress readers includes instruction in constructing meaning, graphophonics, and phonemic awareness.

Putting It All Together

Gaskins et al. (1997) explain that the more functional knowledge students have about the alphabetic system and how words are structured systematically to represent speech, the more fluent

and automatic they become as readers. Accordingly, Gaskins et al. (1997), claim that there are at least four ways to read words: By sight, by letter-sound decoding, by analogy, and by contextual guessing.

To read words by sight, readers retrieve information about the words stored in memory from previous experiences reading the words. Letter-sound decoding involves sounding out the letters and blending them into sounds. Analogizing consists of accessing memory information about familiar sight words to read unknown words, for example, reading shower by recognizing how it is similar to the word flower. Contextual guessing involves using meaning-bearing cues in preceding text or in pictures to predict what a word might be. Sight word reading is the principal way that familiar words are read. Unfamiliar words that have not been stored in memory such as sight words are read by decoding, analogy, or contextual guessing. (Gaskins, 1997, p. 173)

An effective teacher can not teach solution strategies that will help beginning readers become independent readers without giving them the opportunity to practice reading.

Good Readers Read

"In the last few years, researchers have compiled an impressive list of studies investigating repeated reading (or multiple readings of connected text) as a technique for improving reading ability" (Dowhower, 1989, p. 502). This simple rehearsal strategy is a viable instructional tool for developmental readers in regular classrooms. With low reading groups, the teacher first

reads the story to the group and then constructs a story map and summary of the content together with the children. Next, the teacher uses choral reading and echo reading to develop oral fluency. Finally, the children practice reading a segment of the text independently. Evidence indicates strongly that repeated reading works. It helps students remember and understand more, increases their oral reading speed and accuracy, and improves students' oral reading expression (Dowhower, 1989).

Other research has shown that slow progress children need more opportunities to practice reading (Clay, 1991). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1996) indicates that numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of increasing students' exposure to literacy materials in their homes.

"Students' exposure to various reading materials at home and family support for students' school and literacy efforts can play a critical role in students' growth as readers" (NCES, 1996, p. 1).

Conclusion

The independent reader reads often and operates on print in an integrated way in search for meaning. He looks for links between what he knows and what he wants to know. While reading, he asks the questions "Does it look right?", "Does it sound right?", and "Does it make sense?" in the context of what he's reading. He reads a lot with high accuracy and a high self-correction rate.

Project Outcomes and Processes

As a result of teaching beginning reading strategies, during the period of September, 1997 to February, 1998, the targeted

first graders who do not use beginning reading strategies will increase their ability to read by using picture cues, sound-to-letter associations, and the context of the literature as measured by letter identification, sight word vocabulary identification, a developmental spelling inventory, a student writing sample, and running records.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. The students who do not use beginning reading strategies are identified by a series of informal measures of early literacy development.
2. Skill groups are formed and lessons are planned for instructional purposes based on the needs of the students for success in literacy acquisition using a series of informal measures of early literacy development.
3. Efforts are made to get parents involved in the first grade literacy program for the purpose of supporting and extending the development of skills necessary for the students success in reading and writing.
4. Student are assessed periodically to inform instruction and to document student progress over time.

Action Plan

- I. The students who do not use beginning reading strategies are identified by a series of informal measures of early literacy development.

A. Who

First grade students who do not use beginning reading strategies.

B. What

Students are assessed using informal measures of early literacy development. These measures include letter identification, sight word vocabulary identification, a developmental spelling inventory, and a writing sample.

C. Why

Students are identified for instructional purposes.

D. When

Students are assessed during the first two weeks of the beginning of the 1997 school year.

- II. Skill groups are formed and lessons are planned for instructional purposes based on the needs of the students for success in literacy acquisition using a series of early literacy development.

A. Who

All first grade students are grouped initially according to the results of the series of informal measures of early literacy development.

B. What

Weekly lessons are planned according to the needs of the students to develop skills necessary for success in reading and writing.

C. Why

All students in the first grade do not need to learn beginning reading and writing strategies. Groups are formed for instructional purposes.

D. When

Groups are formed after every student has been assessed and results of measurements have been analyzed to identify students who do use beginning reading strategies.

III. Efforts are made to get parents involved in the first grade literacy program for the purpose of supporting and extending the development of skills necessary for the students success in reading and writing.

A. Who

The teacher promotes a teamwork approach to get parents involved in supporting first grade literacy learning objectives.

B. What

The teacher stresses the importance of teamwork between the parent and the teacher in order to successfully support the student in early literacy acquisition. Parents are given a list of suggestions to help their student acquire lifelong reading habits and a reading log sheet, along with a cover letter stressing the importance of reading and being read to, to record the different books parents or students are reading at home.

C. Why

Parental involvement is a very important aspect of students success in early literacy acquisition. Their interest and support are essential in helping students realize that reading is an important skill to develop. This team approach also provides an additional

opportunity to reinforce reading skills taught in the classroom.

D. When

Meet the Teacher Day is the first opportunity for parents and teachers to meet. Also, during Back-to-School Night the teacher stresses the importance of the teamwork approach. Then at Parent/Teacher Conferences specific strategies are discussed to help students become skilled beginning readers. These conferences take place in November and in March of the 1997 school year.

IV. Students are assessed periodically to inform instruction and to document student progress over time.

A. Who

The students of the first grade class who do not use beginning reading strategies.

B. What

Students are assessed using informal measures of early literacy development. These measures include letter identification, sight word vocabulary identification, a developmental spelling inventory, and a writing sample.

C. Why

Students are assessed initially to inform instruction. Other assessments are used periodically to continue to inform instruction and to document student progress over time.

D. When

- Letter Identification

To be administered to all first graders at the beginning of the school year and at teacher discretion.

- Sight Word Vocabulary

To be administered in September, February and May.

- Developmental Spelling Inventory

To be administered in September, February and May.

- Attitude Survey

To be administered at the beginning and end of the school year.

- Writing Samples

Continuous throughout the school year.

- Benchmark Books/Running Records

Benchmark Books/Running Records will be utilized throughout the year at the teacher's discretion.

Results will be utilized as indicators that a student is ready to move on to another level.

Method of Assessment

To assess, within the targeted classroom, the teacher-researcher will use district accepted measurements which include the following tests: letter identification, sight word vocabulary identification, developmental spelling inventory, student writing sample, and running records. Both pre- and post-data collection will be conducted using this assessment plan.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to teach first grade students who do not use beginning reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers the strategies that will help them become independent readers.

Implementation of Strategies

The students who did not use beginning reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers were identified by a series of informal (not standardized) measures of early literacy development. After these students were identified, skill groups were formed and daily lessons were planned for instructional purposes based on the needs of the students for success in literacy acquisition. The lessons that were planned were scaffolded to help build a firm foundation of literacy acquisition. A total of 150 minutes in the morning was devoted to teaching reading and writing on a daily basis and another 45 minute block of time was set aside in the afternoon for independent reading. Before the teacher could begin instruction, it was necessary to help the students think about hearing sounds in words or phonemic awareness.

Phonemic Awareness

In order to introduce the concept of phonemic awareness, the

teacher read familiar nursery rhymes and stories that had rhyming patterns to the students on a daily basis for about a week. To further reinforce this concept, the teacher played rhyming word games within the context of the literature being read by substituting rhyming words in the story with rhyming words that the students had chosen. To begin teaching reading strategies the teacher focused on helping the students understand concepts of print.

Concepts of Print

Focusing on concepts of print helped the students understand that a collection of letters make up words, and a collection of words make up sentences, and that sentences make up text. The teacher taught these basic concepts by modeling reading using big books. To get the students involved with the meaning of the text, the teacher took a "picture walk" through the book to help the students understand that the pictures of the story help them know what the print says. It also helped teach how a book is structured; that is, where the story begins, how it continues in a left to right direction, and where it ends.

After taking a "picture walk" through the text, the teacher focused on the print to help them understand that the print carries the message of the story and that it goes in a left to right direction. The teacher pointed to each word while reading the text making sure to stress the beginning sounds of the words, and the spaces between each word. Eventually the teacher progressed to stressing beginning, ending, and medial sounds of words while reading.

By modeling the reading of the text and following the print in a left to right direction, the teacher also taught the students where to begin and end reading on the page. The focus on reading in a left to right direction was then linked to teaching the students what direction they should use when beginning to write.

Writing

Understanding that writing is an integral part of teaching students to read, the teacher met daily with each student, individually, to engage him/her in the writing process. In order to involve the students in the process, the teacher generated ideas for writing from the students by allowing them to use their ideas as topics for daily writing activities. Sometimes the students drew pictures to stimulate ideas for writing. The teacher also explained that in first grade students use "invented spelling" to begin writing ("Invented spelling" is when the students use letter/sound association or phonics instead of correct spelling to write the words that they're trying to express while engaging in the writing process).

The students began writing very simple and repetitive sentences with the teacher observing, modeling, and guiding every step of the process. The beginning focus was to get an initial letter for each word that the students wanted to write emphasizing that there are spaces between words. To help them with letter/sound associations, the teacher showed the students a familiar picture of an animal or object that represented the initial sound and letter of the word that they wanted to write. Once the writing was completed, the students read their sentence or sentences while pointing to each word attempt. During this

process, the students were constantly praised for their attempts at writing. Then the teacher wrote each word correctly above the students' writing, without crossing out any of the students' writing. Finally, the students and the teacher read the teacher's writing together while pointing to each word.

Every day as the students progressed, the level of difficulty in writing increased. If they began with initial word/letter sound associations, they'd progress to initial and final letter/sound associations. Then they'd be expected to incorporate some vowels and medial consonants in their words until they became aware of the concepts of print and felt comfortable enough with the writing process to begin writing without the teacher monitoring every step of their writing.

Emphasizing phonics using the writing process was one way of teaching phonics as a beginning reading strategy. Another method, using phonics, was to group students for daily guided reading.

Guided Reading

Guided reading was used to teach specific reading strategies directly to the students. During guided reading, each student had a copy of the same emergent reader. The teacher read the title and took the students on a "picture walk" through the text while stressing certain vocabulary words. After establishing a purpose for reading, the students attempted to read the text while constantly being supported by the teacher. To help them use visual/graphophonic cues the teacher said, "Look at the beginning letter" of the word or to help them get the meaning from the text "Did you look at the picture?" was asked. If what was read didn't make sense the teacher asked "Does that make sense?" If it

didn't, "Go back and read that sentence again using the beginning letter of the word and the picture to help you," was suggested. These beginning reading strategies were reinforced on a daily basis. Later, the higher level comprehension strategies were introduced. The teacher would ask, "What do you think might happen?", or "Why do you think they did that?", or "How did you know that?", or "What would make sense there?" All the time teaching them to use picture cues, graphophonic cues, and meaning to help them monitor and correct their own reading. These strategies were also reinforced on a daily basis when the teacher read aloud to the class.

Reading Aloud

The teacher chose high interest, predictable, or rhyming books to read to the students to get them involved in the story and to reinforce the concept of phonemic awareness. The teacher read to the students on a daily basis focusing on fluency, comprehension, and rhyming patterns. Before reading, questions were asked to tap into the students' prior knowledge of the topic or main idea of the story. The students also made predictions to set the stage for meaningful reading. While reading the text, the teacher encouraged the students to respond to their predictions to keep them involved in the story and to enhance comprehension. At the end of the story, to further enhance comprehension, the teacher asked questions that were designed to promote creative and critical responses to the story. The stories that were read aloud to the students were used to stimulate thinking for planned follow-up activities.

Follow-up Activities

The extended follow-up activities to the stories being read aloud were designed to enhance the students' comprehension and to create interest in reading. The teacher and the students worked together to create plays, puppet shows, and role playing activities to respond to the literature being read in the classroom. When the teacher wanted to get more specific, a story web was created to bring out the different characteristics of the story, or a venn diagram was used to compare and contrast two characteristics in a story or two different stories. Discussion groups were formed and charts were used to teach the different story elements. Sometimes, the students discussed and wrote different endings to the stories that were read. Some stories were read with a buddy and then discussed before responding to a planned writing activity.

The objective was to get the students interested and involved in the reading process. To build on this interest in reading and to support the process, the teacher set aside a block of time for sustained silent reading and student-as-the-teacher reading.

Good Readers Read

Every day the students chose books out of their book baskets (books specifically chosen for their reading abilities) to read silently for 10 minutes. Silent reading was followed by an approximate 15 minute block of time for student-as-a-teacher reading. When a student practiced a book of his or her choice, at home or school and knew all the words in the story, he/she could sit in the teacher's chair and read the story to the class.

Practicing reading strategies on a daily basis was an integral part of the reading program. The teacher provided opportunities for practicing reading at school and expected parents to provide support at home.

Parental Support

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher met with all the students' parents to promote a teamwork approach for the purpose of supporting and extending the development of reading and writing skills at home. The teacher talked about how the parents could help their children realize that reading and writing were useful and life long skills. By explaining that beginning readers must practice their reading skills every day until the strategies that they were learning became automatic, the teacher suggested 20 minutes of modeled, shared, or independent reading at home for at least five evenings a week. To help the parents select appropriate books for reading aloud to their children, a list of good books to read aloud was provided. The teacher also suggested that the children get their own library cards so they could begin to use the library as a resource. A log sheet and a letter explaining its purpose was sent home to record all books read at home.

The teacher also suggested many ways that the parents could involve their children in authentic writing activities that were fun. Some of the suggested writing activities were letters and cards to relatives or friends, writing party invitations or thank you notes, adding a few items to a grocery list, or keeping a personal journal. To keep the parents informed on current reading and writing research, the teacher sent home copies of professional

journal or newspaper articles for them to read. The researcher also sent home weekly and monthly newsletters reminding the parents of the importance of reading at home. After implementing the strategies that help first grade students who do not use beginning reading strategies, it is necessary to assess the effects of teaching them the strategies that helped them to become independent readers.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of teaching first grade students who do not use beginning reading strategies that will help them to become independent readers a series of informal (not standardized) measures of early literacy development were used to measure the effects of teaching them reading strategies that will help them become independent readers.

To identify and document the students use of beginning reading strategies, the researcher gathered evidence by assessing all students of the targeted first grade class using the following district literacy assessments: (a) letter identification, (b) sight word vocabulary, (c) developmental spelling inventory, and (d) writing samples and (e) benchmark books/running records. The first measure used to document the students progress was the letter identification assessment.

Letter Identification

In September, 75% of the students identified 54 letters with little or no difficulty. The letter identification scores for the lowest scoring students were not extremely low, but they were the five lowest scores of the targeted first grade class of 20 students. One of the lowest scores of the lowest scoring students

was 49 letters out of 54 letters and the other four lowest scoring students' scores were 50 letters of 54 letters.

In February, the lowest scoring students showed growth by identifying the 54 letters with no difficulty. The lowest scoring students made similar gains by reading a significant number of the 100 high-frequency first grade level sight words.

Sight Word Identification

In September, 75% of the students identified ten or more of the 100 sight words. In February, 100% of the targeted first grade students identified 81 or more of the 100 high-frequency first grade level sight words. The five lowest scoring students who scored a zero, zero, three, five, and five on sight word identification in September, showed significant growth by scoring 100, 81, 83, 90, and 95 respectively in February. This means that these students went from zero-.05 percent ability to read sight words in September to 81-100% ability to read 100 sight words in February. The developmental spelling inventory also showed growth and development in areas of hearing/writing sounds in words as well as visual information about printed text.

Developmental Spelling Inventory

In September, 75% of the students scored at the phonetic level or above the phonetic level. The five lowest scoring students of the targeted first grade class scored below the phonetic stage. Three students scored at the precommunicative stage of development and two students scored between the precommunicative and the semiphonic stages of development.

In February, 85% of the targeted first grade students scored at the transitional level or at the correct level of

hearing/writing sounds in words. All of the low scoring students who scored at the precommunicative or the semiphonic stage of development in September, scored above the phonetic stage in February. Of the three students who scored at the precommunicative stage of development in September, one scored between the transitional and the correct stage, another scored at the transitional stage, and the other scored between the phonetic and the transitional stage of development. Of the two students who scored between the precommunicative and semiphonetic stages of development in September, one scored at the transitional stage and the other scored between the phonetic and the transitional stage of development in February.

This progress indicates that the five lowest scoring students have shown growth and development in areas of hearing/writing sounds in words verifying their ability to use strategies in reading to help them be independent or to become independent readers. This growth in hear/writing sounds in words has also affected the writing in a positive way.

Writing

In September, in the writing sample, 75% of the students were at the Early Invented Spelling, the Transitional Spelling, or the Conventional Spelling stage. One of the low scoring students wrote random letters and then erased them. This student decided to draw a picture instead of writing. Two other low scoring students wrote two letters next to each other with each letter representing two different words. The beginning letters were correct for the two words that the students wanted to write but there was no knowledge of spaces between words. This writing was

followed by an insistance that the teacher help with the spelling of their last word and then no further attempt at writing was made by the students. The fourth low scoring student also wrote two beginning letter sounds that correctly represented the beginning of the two separate words with spaces between each letter, and then followed these letters with three random letters that had no letter/sound association. The last student wrote two correct letters using early invented spelling and then wrote two clusters of letters attempting to write words randomly with no letter/sound association.

In February, 100% of the targeted first grade class were at the Conventional Spelling Stage of development in their ability to write. The progress that the lowest scoring students have made in February is consistent with the progress that they've made in letter identification, reading sight words, and in hearing/writing words in the developmental spelling inventory. The progress in writing is supported by their ability to read benchmarked books.

Benchmark Books/Running Records

In September, the researcher did not assess the targeted first grade students using benchmarked books with running records to inform instruction. Instead, the letter identification, sight word and developmental spelling inventories, and the writing samples were used for this purpose. The benchmarked books with running records were used periodically throughout the school year to inform instruction and to document student progress over time once the targeted low scoring first grade students attempted to read text.

In February, the researcher assessed all of the students of the targeted first grade class to record and document their progress using the district's first and second grade benchmarked books with running records. Teachers are instructed by the district to strive to administer benchmark running records so that students achieve success (90% accuracy). Benchmark book levels A and B are considered readiness level books, C, D, and E are preprimer level books, F and G are primer level books, H and I are Grade One books, and J, K, L, and M are Grade Two level books.

In February 85% of the targeted first grade class were reading at level K or above. One low scoring student who is participating in the reading resource program, read at level F and the other student participating in the reading resource program read at level G. These benchmark running record assessments indicate that three of the targeted first grade students who did not use beginning reading strategies to help them become independent readers in September were reading the district leveled second grade text independently in February. The two students participating in the reading resource program also showed significant growth in their ability to read. Both were reading at a primer level in February. Considering their progress to date, these students are expected to be reading independently on a first grade level or above by the end of the school year in June.

The letter identification, the sight word vocabulary test, the developmental spelling inventory, the writing sample, and the benchmark books with running records for the targeted first grade students provided valuable information about the skills and strategies that the students were using to help them be and become

independent readers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on teaching first graders beginning reading strategies that will help them become independent readers, the targeted first grade low scoring students showed marked improvement in their ability to use beginning reading strategies to read independently. While it is known that children develop early reading and writing skills at their own rates and in their own ways, this research shows that there are developmental aspects of learning to read and write and that an acquisition of certain skills and strategies is necessary for success in reading and writing especially for beginning readers who do not use reading strategies that will help them become independent readers.

In order to teach the strategies that are necessary for first grade students to become independent readers, it is recommended that first grade teachers learn the strategies that are being taught by the experts. The experts are concerned with preventing reading failure and are involved in extensive research that has influenced many intervention programs throughout the United States like the Winston-Salem project, the Success For All program in the Baltimore and Philadelphia area, the Early Intervention in Reading Project in Minnesota, the Boulder Project in Colorado, and the Reading Recovery Program that is taught in different areas throughout the United States and the world. The experts are teaching teachers how to teach the students who are most at risk for reading failure by being involved in workshops, seminars, and conferences that address solutions to the problem. They have

written numerous articles for teachers' journals and many books on the subject. (The reference section of this research paper refers to some of them.) Their objective is to help teachers understand the problem and to inform them on how to teach the strategies that will help students at risk of failing to learn to read. Teachers, who want to teach first grade students who are at risk for reading failure, should learn the intervention strategies taught by the experts who know how to help at risk first grade students become independent readers. With more teachers implementing these strategies, the number of first grade beginning readers can only increase.

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